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# the JOURNAL of OPEDA



*Advancing professionalism among employees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture*

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## PROFESSIONALISM IS AN ATTITUDE

Acceptance remarks of Truman L. Ward, OPEDA's Professional of the Year, given at the 1985 National Council Meeting. Dr. Ward is a Research Physicist, Southern Regional Research Center, New Orleans, La.

I am very grateful for this "Professional of the Year Award." For me it is more of a professional career award since this marks the fortieth year of my Federal service. Also, this type of award is especially meaningful since it comes from peers. I am somewhat uncomfortable in that I have always thought of myself as a team player and I do realize that there are many as deserving who never receive such public recognition. I hope that what I say will make us all feel like winners.

We are professionals so I want us to think together for awhile about professionalism as an attitude and to get us started, I have a short story about a farmer and a young minister just out of seminary. The minister goes out to a little rural church to preach his first sermon and is greeted on the church porch by a farmer. They introduce themselves and chat for awhile. The minister glances at his watch and says, "since there are only the two of us, I don't suppose there's any need to go through with the service so I'll just go on back to town and you can get on with your chores." "No Sirree!" the farmer replies. "You came to preach and I came to listen so let's get on with it." They go into the little church and the young minister goes through his sermon using all of the techniques he had learned in the seminary. After the service, the two of them are back on the porch. The young minister asks, "What did you think of my sermon?" The farmer answers, "The sermon

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## PUBLIC IMAGE OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES & RETIREES

The past nine years have been tough on Federal employees and retirees. It has been politically attractive to target Federal employees and civil service retirees as a cause for our budgetary ills. It is attractive because the general public perceives the Federal employee as lazy, overpaid, etc. In the public eye, Federal employees and retirees are not being treated unfairly, but only getting what is deserved.

The job of reversing this image is one job that OPEDA members have asked the Board to undertake. It is a task we cannot do alone. The good news is that help is being provided and progress is being made. We hope that by now most OPEDA members are aware of the Public Employees Roundtable (PER) and OPEDA's membership and participation in the effort. If not, here is a current update.

Plans for a Public Employees Roundtable began to crystallize in April 1982 among members of the Senior Executive Association who were painfully aware of the need to improve the public image of government employees to counter the growing drumbeat of self-serving criticism by a number of political and special-interest groups. Within a year, over 20 professional and management associations had joined together with the objective of informing our fellow citizens, our lawmakers, and the media of the dedication and quality of the more than sixteen million public employees who serve our country every day. The Roundtable presently consists of twenty-four member organizations dedicated to the following goals:

- To inform America of the quality of people in government and the value of the services they perform;

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## WHY DO I BELONG TO OPEDA?

Ever ask yourself that question? If not, you should! Otherwise, you are just taking membership for granted, which is bad for you-- and bad for OPEDA.

The best thing that could happen to OPEDA would be if each member took a little time to ask, "Why am I a dues-paying member?" If thoughtful consideration were given to the question, the answers might be very revealing, and could lead to a better more effective organization. Several members asking themselves the question came up with these reasons:

It takes strength in numbers and concerted action to accomplish anything worthwhile-- really more can be accomplished collectively than individually. I believe OPEDA expresses my interests and concerns to lawmakers far more effectively than I could do alone.

Even when my profession and career command my full attention, the officers and headquarters staff keep working for my interests. Maintaining my membership is a vote of confidence in them, and at the same time I know I'm doing my share to protect the interests of professional employees of USDA.

Through my membership in OPEDA, I receive the OPEDA News and can obtain position statements, legislative reports and other information to keep me informed of activities that can affect my job, professionalism and my pay and benefits. Most everything else I get is either aimed at a wider audience more narrowly focused on my special discipline.

I owe it to myself, my career and my profession to help USDA and the U.S. Government to move forward finding ways to more efficiently carry out programs and provide high quality and responsive services to the public. Through my membership I am represented at USDA, and OPEDA works to achieve quality service to the public.

The OPEDA chapter meetings and work on committee assignments have given me ideas and sights that I could obtain in no other way. It provides me with an opportunity to meet people with similar concerns and to contribute. Make no mistake, it gives me the feeling that I have done something for the general good of the USDA community.

The cost of belonging is small compared with what I get in return. It is similar to a small insurance payment. I make it to protect my considerable investment in my USDA career and profession. It helps me protect my job, pay, benefits, and retirement, as well as giving me opportunities to help my government and the public.

## COUNCIL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

### OPEDA Membership Committee Looks Ahead:

A 1987 "Special Event" Campaign and a Direct Mail effort for 1986 kept the Membership Committee busy at the recent 1985 Council Meeting. Committee members Dave Berna (SCS), Gordon Forsyth (ASCS), Gene Hassler (SCS-ret.), Dave Humphrey (SRS), Steve Musser (SCS), and guest Virginia Hungerford met under the leadership of Howard Burnett (FS) to discuss the why, where, when, and who of membership recruiting.

The Committee approved the long-term membership plan for OPEDA and then began its implementation by the following:

-Direct Mail: With the coming of office automation equipment, OPEDA will be able to undertake a direct mail effort. The plan is to identify USDA employees eligible for OPEDA membership and invite them to join. It is proposed that this invitation will include the name of an OPEDA member that could provide further information. This effort is proposed for 1986.

-Special Event: It is proposed that a Special Event campaign be scheduled for March, April, May, and June of 1987. The themes being considered tie into the Constitution Bicentennial.

-Other Proposals: OPEDA should study various incentives to encourage payroll deductions.

OPEDA should obtain a portable display for use at various professional and USDA meetings to aid in recruiting.

These proposals are now being considered for inclusion in OPEDA's 1986 Plan of Work.

(See pages 6, 7 and 8 for more COUNCIL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS.)

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was okay, but I'm a farmer and I have some cows and every morning I load up my wagon with hay and I go down to feed my cows--but if only one cow shows up, I don't dump the whole load of hay."

Why did I tell that story? Well, mainly because I think it's funny, and it involves a farmer (we do work for USDA). Also, it serves to remind me not to try and dump the whole load of hay on you tonight. There is another cogent point or two. Both characters in the story were professionals in a sense. They both liked to play to packed houses. Both were in jobs where service was expected. The minister, though, wished he were somewhere else and the farmer didn't believe in overdoing things. I think that by now each of us has in mind an image of each of the characters in the story. Whether we like it or not as individuals and as groups we create images in people's minds.

As professionals, we have an image problem. Whether in government or in the private sector, we have an image as being uncaring--uncaring about how we do our job and the effect of that on other persons and on society. Rodney Dangerfield would say, "We don't get no respect." It hasn't always been that way. As a little boy, I lived a short distance from a railroad line. When I would hear a whistle, I would run down to the track to watch the train go by. I marveled at the sight and the sound and the power of the huge steam locomotive that pulled over a hundred cars loaded with freight; and I admired the men who operated the trains. In those days people set their watches by the trains. At that time, I didn't know the difference between a locomotive engineer and a chemical engineer, but I knew those men did a good job and were proud of it, and I respected them for it. I wasn't alone; the whole town felt that way. We also felt that way about the doctors, the policemen, the county clerk, the teachers. We didn't feel that way just in Tyler, Texas, either. People all over this country valued their professional people. At different times as I grew up I wanted to be a fireman, a locomotive engineer, a teacher, a physician. I didn't want to be a scientist then, but there were no scientists in Tyler. My point is that professionals were admired and respected and young people wanted to be like them. The more I've thought about it, the more I've come to the conclusion that professionalism does involve skill and training to be sure, but above all; professionalism is an attitude.

Sometimes when I get to thinking about a word, I go to the dictionary and find I thought wrong. I had some ideas about professionalism, but decided to check it and its root word, profession, out with old friend Webster. I used the big one we always called the unabridged, the third international version. Webster defines profession thusly: a calling requiring specialized knowledge or training and committing its members to a kind of work that has for its prime purpose the rendering of a public service. I like that. Let me go over it again with you. A profession is a calling that requires specialized knowledge or training and committing its members to a kind of work that has for its prime purpose the rendering of a public service. I also like his definition of professionalism; the conduct, aims or qualities that mark a profession or a professional person. Another dictionary speaks of character and spirit. It all seems to fit well with my statement that professionalism is an attitude.

Talent and training are certainly important, but they are only the beginning. They alone are not enough to make us truly professional. Professionalism is an attitude. As a youngster, I first read about Leonard Day Vinkey. That's how I said it in Tyler. I later learned he was Leonardo Da Vinci (Italian). He was the great painter, sculptor, architect, civil engineer, scientist, and inventor. Some say that he was the single most talented individual who has ever lived. He painted the most widely recognized art object in the world (the Mona Lisa); he designed and supervised the building of numerous buildings and gardens; he left over three thousand papers and treatises dealing with such subjects as anatomy of the human body, the flight of birds, and the nature of water. His instructions for painting led to him being called the father of the Renaissance in European art. His design for a glider has been tested and flown. With all of this talent he is reputed to have said, "talent is common, it is dedication that is rare."



A short time ago, Pete Rose became the new holder of the record for most career hits in major league baseball. On almost the same day that Pete Rose broke that record, a well known professional football player was calling it quits--prematurely. A New Orleans sportswriter penned an interesting commentary comparing the two. He wrote that the football player possessed great talent and could have achieved fame to equal that of Pete Rose, but while one was closing out a career with fame and honor, the other was dropping out of a career a victim of drug abuse and a wrong attitude. I once worked with a young college graduate who had great grades and a promising career. He thought his degree was a union card and all that he needed. Many years later, he is wondering why he hasn't progressed. We have a fellow in our building who has the reputation for thinking that because he is a professional, mundane work is beneath his dignity. Though the percentage may be small, a few persons with the wrong attitude can cause all professionals to lose respect.

Just as training and talent are not enough to make one truly professional, so also pay is not enough. We have our share of the pre-retirement retired. We also have those whose only reason for working is to get the money. We have those whose main concern is when they will be promoted and the only reason they want a promotion is to get more money. You and I both know the kind. I like Pete Rose. He has the right attitude. He would play his heart out in a sandlot game. Oh, he likes money too (who doesn't), but there are more important things. Professionalism is an attitude.

As professionals, we need to clean up our act. We need to gain respect for ourselves and for other professionals; and then the public will respect us. We need to be diligent--always trying to do a good job. We need to be studious--always trying to learn to do the job better. We need to be ethical in our dealings with the public and with each other--none of this getting ahead at all costs, and we need to be servants--always remembering that whether we work for the government or in the private sector, our calling is to a kind of work which has for its prime purpose the rendering of a public service. We need to develop these traits in ourselves, and we need to encourage our young folks in the same direction.

I haven't always succeeded at what I've tried, but I do keep trying and along the way I often recall a poem we learned in grammar school. I think it says something. A part of it goes like this:

If you can't be a pine on the top of a hill,  
be a shrub in the valley.  
But be the best little shrub by the side of the hill.  
Be a shrub if you can't be a tree.  
If you can't be a shrub, be a blade of the grass  
and some highway happier make.  
It isn't by size that you win or you fail,  
be the best of whatever you are.  
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- To develop a stronger esprit de corps among public employees; and
- To encourage interest in civil service careers.

What is new and different about the Public Employees Roundtable from all efforts in the past, is the tremendous strides toward its goals that it has achieved in just over three short years.

National Multi-media Campaign: Through the establishment of regional roundtables, PER is carrying on a publicity campaign to help educate the public about the services performed by government employees. With the use of public service announcements, slide shows, speakers bureaus, radio and television talk shows, and video tapes, the Roundtable is making progress in raising the public awareness and level of debate about public service and its role in the development and future of our nation.

Grant Award: The Roundtable received a major grant of money to assist in carrying out its multi-media campaign. The grant was used to produce a series of nationally syndicated newspaper articles on government employees, their work and contributions, and public service announcements (PSA's) which reached a viewing audience of over 95 million people in twenty-three states.

The grant was also used to finance a national "Friends of the Roundtable" campaign and grassroots fundraiser to help strengthen the Roundtable's future efforts.

Events Honoring Public Service: On January 16, 1983, the Roundtable sponsored Public Employees Appreciation Day, celebrating the centennial anniversary of the founding of the career civil service. One year later, the Roundtable held a second tribute to public employees by hosting a special performance by the comedian Mark Russell, which was supported by over 50 nationally known leaders. In May 1985, the Roundtable sponsored a national conference on "Excellence in Public Management" at the University of Maryland. Over 300 people attended the conference, chaired by the Honorable William D. Ruckelshaus.

Sponsorship of Platform Planks: For the 1984 national presidential and congressional elections, the Roundtable drafted a series of planks to be included in the major parties' platform statements. The platform planks were endorsed by eleven prominent, nationally known citizens. On May 2, 1984, the planks were presented by Dr. Arthur Fleming, Vernon Jordan and representatives of the Roundtable to the chairs of both parties' platform committees. Representatives from the PER testified before both the Democratic and Republican platform committees. This effort on the part of the Roundtable resulted in the Democratic and Republican platforms including positive language concerning Federal employees.

The Campaign for Excellence: More than talking about the good work of public employees, the Roundtable is working to better promote the excellent work of government employees. Through working with top officials in the Reagan Administration, the Roundtable has begun an effort to recognize and highlight the excellent management improvements being undertaken by the career Federal workforce, to better involve career employees in the decision-making process, and to improve training and retraining of employees. The Roundtable's campaign has attracted the attention of White House officials and is beginning to be implemented in Federal agencies.

Corporate Sponsorship: The Roundtable recently entered into a five-year agreement with Coleman and Christison, Inc., an advertising and public relations agency, which is expected to raise in excess of \$1,000,000 a year for PER programs through the offering of four levels of corporate sponsorship to selected companies interested in the quality of our nation's public service.

Letter to the President: In a letter dated August 23, 1985, to President Reagan, the Roundtable stated: "Public employees are committed to excellence. America works because of the public employees who guard its borders, teach its children, and protect its environment. We are a world leader thanks to the daily contributions of millions of government workers who have dedicated their lives to public service. Their commitment to efficient and effective government is key to a better America. That commitment is there today in every state capital, municipality, and Federal activity. To transform it into better, more productive services to the public requires three steps; 1) Recognize excellence; 2) Foster excellence; and 3) Reward excellence."

Friends of the Roundtable: As mentioned earlier, PER is presently conducting a nationwide "Friends of the Roundtable" campaign to build a network of "grassroots" support. NARFE and its members already represent the largest group of participants actively assisting in Roundtable activities. Anyone wishing to become a charter member of the "Friends of the Employees Roundtable" for an annual membership fee of \$15.00 may do so by sending their name and address, together with a check made out to the Public Employees Roundtable, P. O. Box 7610, Ben Franklin Station, Washington, D. C. 20044



OPEDA's Council representatives and chapter officers are not only lending their support to the national effort but already support the Regional Roundtables. The work of the Roundtable supports OPEDA's efforts by raising the understanding by the public of the contributions and the vital role of public employees, Federal, state, and local. If you have any suggestions, comments, or questions regarding PER activities, let us know.

OPEDA extends appreciation to George "Ed" Auman, National Vice President of the National Association of Retired Federal Employees (NARFE), as a contributor to this article.

#### COUNCIL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS (Cont.)

##### OPEDA's 1986 Program Proposals:

In his opening remarks at the 1985 Council Meeting President Peterson gave emphasis to the importance of leadership. With that beginning, the meeting got underway.

The proposals being considered by the Council and Board are categorized in the major OPEDA program areas--Economics, Legislation, Public Service, and Professionalism.

Economics: Council Members Connie Shay (FCIC), Howard Williams (ASCS), Don Lambert (REA), and James Kasal (ERS), assisted by consultants Avi Dey of Moseley, and Richard Ford (Past OPEDA President) met under the leadership of Vice President Martha Ransom (AMS).

Major proposals are listed below:

-Financial and Retirement Planning Workshops: OPEDA should move ahead as quickly as possible to provide opportunities for field-located employees as well as headquarters personnel to plan their financial futures. It is proposed that training be provided to three levels or age groups: (1) those starting and/or with few family responsibilities, (2) mid-career and/or with family responsibilities, and (3) those in the latter years of their Federal careers.

-Retirement Information: OPEDA should develop, select, and provide information to assist members in making decisions regarding selection of the retirement options provided such options are available in the new supplemental retirement system.

-Public Liability: OPEDA in cooperation with OGC and other experts in the field of public liability prepare an article on what the OPEDA members should know about public liability.

Legislation: Council Members Jean Gronnert (SCS-ret.), James Hilton (ARS), Charles McDougall (ES-ret.), Michael Miller (FmHA), Don Redmond (FS-ret.), and Truman Ward (ARS), met under the leadership of Vice President Eugene Boyles (ASCS-ret.) Proposals accepted by the Council are listed below:

-Legislative Network: Over 110 "OPEDA Alerts" are now mailed to members who have volunteered to contact their Senators and Congressmen on selected employee/retiree issues. We have volunteers in each state and over 80 Congressional Districts are covered. The committee program is to encourage each chapter or state to have a legislative liaison or chairperson.

-Legislative Initiatives: OPEDA should continue to give retirement its top 1985-86 legislative priority. This is followed by the need to seek pay comparability with the private and state sectors and to continue efforts to achieve pay comparability between sexes.

Professionalism: Council Members Creighton Gilbert (SCS-ret.), Marshall Levin (ARS), Bob Miller (ARS), and Georgia Vickers (ASCS), met under the leadership of Vice President Neill Schaller (ERS). The highlights from that meeting were:

-Awards and Recognition: OPEDA should review its award and recognition program, particularly "Professional-of-the-Year" with the view that chapters should be given greater encouragement and incentive to participate. This may require improvements in award descriptions, better promotion of the award, and encouraging recognition of all professionals.

-Public Image: OPEDA should seek to establish a "response network." This network would be chapter based and would respond to misinformation (lies) about Federal employees and retirees.

-The Journal: Work to strengthen The Journal by asking members to write "viewpoint" letters and then publish responses.





President Peterson (right) presents surprise award to Past President Otis Thompson (left)



President Peterson welcomes USDA Assistant Secretary John Franke (left) to meeting



Mike Causey, Federal Editor for The Washington Post, speaks on Federal retiree issues



OPEDA National Honor Award for Walter Fiddler (ARS) is received by Bob Miller



OPEDA National Honor Award is given to Alan Fusonie, NAL (left) by OPEDA Pres.



Council Member Georgia Vickers (ASCS) chairs session on "USDA Today and Tomorrow"



## COUNCIL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS (Cont.)

Public Service: Council Members John Bertz (ASCS), Hampton Burns (SCS-ret.), Odell Ottmar (FmHA), Robbie Robison (SCS), William R. Seymour (ACS), and Sharon Yocum (FmHA) met under the leadership of Vice President Jack Armstrong (ACS). Proposals presented to the Council were:

-Public Employees Recognition Day: OPEDA is to take leadership in the establishment of a Public Employees Recognition Day and encourage support by Chapters and members.

-Quarterly Regional Newsletter: OPEDA will initiate a one-year pilot to test a quarterly newsletter. It will be sent to members of regions. It will contain news of regional and chapter significance. It will not duplicate OPEDA News.

Please! Any member who has suggestions or ideas on the proposals is urged to send them to the appropriate Vice President in care of OPEDA, P. O. Box 381, Washington, D.C. 20044.

## AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

The highlight of the annual Council Meeting continues to be the recognition of individuals and chapters who have worked to advance the cause of professionalism and thereby strengthens our government operation. The October OPEDA News named Truman L. Ward as Professional-of-the-Year and described the basis for Dr. Ward's selection.

Two National Honor Awards were given. Walter Fiddler (ARS) from Philadelphia received the award for "His outstanding service to members of OPEDA and for the leadership and professionalism he demonstrated both as a research leader and as an OPEDA Council Representative." In his absence Dr. Fiddler's award was received by Robert Miller (ARS). Alan Fusonie (NAL) was awarded his National Honor Award for "His exemplary performance that demonstrates to all USDAers the high quality of work and productivity that results from the practice of professionalism."

Chapter Membership Awards went to the three chapters that had recruited at least 40 members or increased their membership by at least 40 percent during the Council Year (October 1 to September 30). These Chapters were, ERRC Chapter (Pa.) (Eastern Regional Research Center) with Don Bills, President; M. Happich,

Vice President; and Robert Miller, Secretary-Treasurer; and Athens Area Chapter (Ga.) with Stuart Nelson (ARS) President; Raymond Bryant (FmHA), Vice President; and Carl Davis (ARS), Secretary-Treasurer; and West Texas Chapter with James Abbott (SCS), (last year's Professional-of-the Year) President; Carrol Adams (SCS), President-Elect; Evelyn Thames (SCS), Secretary-Treasurer; and John Adams (SCS), Membership Chairman.

Members of the following chapters received recognition for outstanding service. The chapters are: Athens Area Chapter (Ga) for "Demonstrating to other chapters around the Nation that chapters can carry out programs to improve USDA employee morale, can help to influence legislation, and that it can be done in a professional manner;" the Inter-agency Chapter for "Revitalizing the Chapter, and undertaking projects which helped USDAers better understand their benefits. Approximately 8,000 USDAers directly benefited from these projects;" Beltsville Chapter (Md.) for "Outstanding efforts to provide information on employee legislation, professionalism, and other current issues to USDA employees in the Beltsville area;" and ERS Chapter for "Completing its series on issues of concern to OPEDA members and for sponsoring an Alumni Day get-together welcoming former ERS employees and retirees to ERS."

The President's Special Award was given to Past President Otis Thompson for "His leadership during his four years as President of OPEDA, for his rebuilding OPEDA's foundation by revitalizing chapters, building a national legislative network, and moving ahead to implement OPEDA philosophy of providing services as needed to all members, and for his exemplary dedication to needs and interests of fellow employees and retirees."

In Truman Ward's acceptance remarks (see page 1), he said "...there are many as deserving who never receive public recognition." We wish we had the space to name each member and chapter deserving of recognition.

## WANTED--YOUR VIEWS

OPEDA's Committee on Professionalism has asked that The Journal include a section titled, "Viewpoints." If you have a view you would like to share with OPEDA members, write OPEDA Journal, P.O. Box 381, Washington, D. C. 20044. Only signed letters can be used however, and only the writer's initials will be used in the publication.